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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 001805

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TIPS FROM THE MFA ON HOW TO FIGHT THE WAR OVER NGO'S IN TAJIKISTAN

CLASSIFIED BY: Tom Armbruster, DCM, Dushanbe, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

1. (C) DCM had a long talk with MFA North America Chief Ismatullo Nasredinov on November 10 on the growing pressure on U.S. and other Western NGO's. The DCM said Tajikistan appeared to be taking a step backwards by not providing registration, visas, or other support for NGO's like the Rotary Club and CADA, two of the latest targets for harassment. Further, Tajikistan cannot expect international businesses to establish in Tajikistan if NGO's are under pressure. Nor can the Embassy advocate more foreign investment if the mission is tied up with defending beleaguered NGO's. Nasredinov, a young official just back from the United States, offered a number of helpful observations.

2. (C) Nasredinov suggested that the Ambassador approach the Foreign Minister about hosting a roundtable discussion on NGO activity in Tajikistan. Since one of DCM's talking points was to suggest a roundtable for November 29-30, DCM readily agreed that Nasredinov had hit on a good idea. Nasredinov said the roundtable would not resolve all problems, but if mid to high level officials from MFA, Justice, and Security attend, there is a good chance of making progress. Nasredinov also suggested that NGO's go on an information offensive and raise their profiles. He said some NGO's such as Save the Children and IFES are well known for their good work. Others "simply register and never do any work or promotion." When DCM raised the Rotary Club for example, an organization that is apparently being denied registration, Nasredinov said most Tajik bureaucrats do not even know that Rotary is a service organization providing community projects and business promotion worldwide. Nasredinov said Tajik officials are only getting one side of the argument (from the Russian propaganda machine) but if presented with both the negative and positive assessments they could analyze the conflicting reports and hopefully come to the right conclusion. As it is now, officials are only hearing the negative side.

3. (C) Nasredinov was quite impressed with his first-ever trip to the United States. He was not aware of the power of business and political lobbies prior to the trip, nor did he expect to hear so many different opinions on foreign policy from his interlocutors. The political debate that he was exposed to was clearly eye opening and extremely useful in shaping his views on American democracy. Nasredinov was impressed with the dynamism of the interagency process and the competition for ideas. American border control procedures in Buffalo, New York were also useful in shaping his thinking on Tajikistan's border operations.

4. (C) COMMENT: Nasredinov is not a power broker in Tajikistan, but he is clearly not on the path to becoming part of the "old guard." He is savvy enough to understand what can and cannot get done in the U.S.-Tajik relationship and he is willing to offer ways forward. However, it is clear that his trip revealed to him just how backward his colleagues can be, particularly on the issue of civil society. Post will have to be careful not to expose Nasredinov as too much of a reformer, and hope that he can rise to a level of influence within the government soon. END COMMENT.

5. (C) AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: We have argued that this government is neither monolithic nor dumb. We need to listen carefully to our mid-level contacts, while recognizing that they have very little influence at this time. We had already planned to begin working on a major information and public relations offensive, and will soon put this into play. We will soon submit a cable outlining what we think is happening in the country and steps that Embassy Dushanbe and the U.S. Government can take in response. While we will inevitably be reactive, we also want to take the high road and search for those strategies that will best promote the goal of transformational diplomacy. END COMMENT.

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